

Think of the great moments of American public policy: the creation of land grant colleges, the G.I. Bill, providing student loans – all directed toward increasing access to higher education.

In Congress, one of my top priorities has been to continue the work of making college more affordable and accessible. In 2007, I helped write the law that lowered interest rates on federal subsidized Stafford loans to 3.4 percent, saving today's typical student borrower a couple thousand dollars.

Yet if Congress fails to act now, interest rates will double to 6.8 percent on July 1, 2012. This would apply to any student taking out a new loan after July 1, whether to start college or to stay in school.

We have 57 days left to prevent this – 57 days to prevent students from facing higher costs when they start classes next year, 57 days to prevent 143,892 New Jersey students from paying an additional \$115 million in borrowing costs over the next year alone.

Next week, the U.S. Senate will be voting on the Stop the Rate Hike Act of 2012, of which I am a cosponsor in the House. The bill would keep loan rates at 3.4 percent, and it would pay for the cost by reining in just a fraction of the taxpayer subsidies to Big Oil.

Among recent college graduates who have taken out student loans, the average borrower owes \$25,000 in education debt. Meanwhile, the five biggest oil companies reported \$33.5 billion in profits in the last three months alone. Who needs our support more: the student, or Big Oil?

2012 Teacher Appreciation Week

May 7th to 11th is Teacher Appreciation Week, a chance to recognize the contributions of educators who teach at levels from kindergarten through college and beyond.

Twelve years ago, I served on the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century, known as the John Glenn Commission. In a report titled "Before It's Too Late," we made clear that our nation must increase the number of teachers in those fields significantly and provide more opportunities for teachers to enhance their math and science teaching skills. Training better teachers was, we found, the single most powerful way to improve math and science education – more powerful even than improving the curriculum. Although the Commission's purview was limited to math and science, I am convinced that high-quality teachers play an equally vital role in other subject areas.

It is long past time to implement the Glenn Commission recommendations and make professional development of teachers one of our top concerns.

2012 Congressional Art Competition

Each year, I host a Congressional Art Competition to celebrate and recognize works of art created by high school students. This year, more than 100 high school artists shared works in categories including painting, drawing, print, and mixed media. Their work demonstrated great creativity, talent, and originality, and I was honored to showcase their efforts.

The overall winner of this year's competition was Loretta Liu from West Windsor Plainsboro High School South, and for the next year, her work "Rush Hour" will be displayed in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. I look forward to seeing her future work in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Rush Holt
Member of Congress